

THE LEGEND

OF

“The Briar Rose.”

PRICE SIXPENCE.

—*Spectator*, 6th January, 1866.

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THE LEGEND
OF
"The Briar Rose."

A SERIES OF PICTURES

PAINTED BY

E. BURNE JONES, A.R.A.

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2, DALE STREET, LIVERPOOL.
1890.

MR EDWIN W. STREETER

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“THE BRIAR ROSE.”

HE joyous Realm of Fairyland has never received such elaborate and such lovely illustration as in this series of four spacious canvases upon which Mr. Burne Jones has given us his own version and view of the charming old-world legend of “The Sleeping Beauty.”

The story itself, in its simpler form, is familiar enough to every nursery. Every young reader of Mother Goose's Fairy Tales knows all about the belated, but beautiful child born at last to the long lamenting king and queen, who lived in that convenient period, both for fairy legend and ideal art, known as “once upon a time.” The splendid christening of the young Princess, the Seven Fairy Godmothers and their gracious gifts, the malice of the recluse old Fairy who by inadvertence had not been invited, all these things are too well known to need detailed setting forth. Every reader will remember how, after the kindly fairies had endowed the child with every gift and grace, the slighted “*vieille Fée qu'on n'avait point priée, parcequ'il y avoit plus de cinquante ans qu'elle n'étoit sortie d'une Tour, et qu'on la croyoit morte, ou enchantée,*” gave unpleasant proof of her existence by declaring that “the Princess should pierce her hand with a spindle and die of the wound.” But the fiats

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of fairyland are not quite so inexorably unalterable as Medo-Persic laws, and childhood was relieved to find that the benignant young Fairy, who had hidden behind the tapestry, was able to commute the sentence of death upon the beautiful Princess into slumbering imprisonment for one hundred years, in a silent palace hidden within an enchanted wood.

The fated spindle of course pierced the Princess's fair hand, of course the century of sleep followed, and equally of course, at the appointed time, the fated Prince penetrated the wood, broke the spell, and awoke the Sleeping Beauty to life and love.

Mr. Burne Jones has naturally treated the old legend in his own way. Perrault called his "Conte du Tems passé," "La Belle au Bois Dormant;" Lord Tennyson in his delicious "Day-Dream," delineates first "The Sleeping Palace;" the painter for pictorial purposes deals with the story as "The Legend of the Briar Rose." In all four pictures the Briar Rose is everywhere, tangling the woody approach, clustering up the "Council Room," trailing about the "Garden Court," and crowding with its sweet, spicy blossoms and tooth-like thorns the inner "Rosebower," where the Sleeping Beauty, surrounded by her slumbering tire-maidens, lies awaiting the advent of the Awakener. It is a beautiful conception, linking and harmonising everything, pictorially-speaking, and from this point of view must the series be regarded.

Perrault says, "Il crut dans un quart d'heure tout autour du Parc une si grande quantité de grands arbres et de petits, de ronces et d'épines entrelassés les unes dans les autres, que bête ni homme n'y auroit

pû passer" (*Histoires ou Contes du Temps passé*, par M. Perrault, M.DCC.XLII). Mr. Burne Jones does not show us the large trees or the small, but only the ubiquitous maze and tangle of stout-stemmed and pinkly blossoming briar. And where should Art be free if not in Fairy Land? Tennyson, painting with the liberal, the unrestrained brush of the poet, says:—

"All round a hedge upshoots, and shows
At distance like a little wood ;
Thorns, ivies, woodbine, mistletoes,
And grapes with bunches red as blood ;
All creeping plants, a wall of green,
Close-matted, bur and brake and briar,
And glimpsing over these, just seen
High up, the topmost palace spire."

A lovely picture—in words. But here and for the painter's purpose of art, to say nothing of possible symbolism, the solitary prevalence of the wild-rose trails and tangles lends a wonderful unity, and an indescribable charm, to the four glowing, but diversely glowing, canvases upon which the artist has told his tale, and, it may be, pointed his moral. For

"Liberal applications lie
In Art like Nature,"

though the commentator need not "cramp its use" by any attempt to "hook it to some useful end."

The tale is told, so far as Mr. Burne Jones purposes to tell it, in four pictures, to each of which Mr. William Morris has supplied, in flowing quatrain, a musical

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motto. The story in the artist's version, begins with the Knight's entry into the enchanted "Briarwood," and closes with a glimpse of the "Rosebower" of the Sleeping Princess. The Knight or Prince of "the fated hand and heart," as he looks fixedly forward over the recumbent bodies of his sleep-stricken predecessors in the adventure, is supposed to see before him what the spectator only discovers picture by picture on the three succeeding canvases. Here we have nothing to do, except inferentially, with the spiteful spell of the Slighted Fairy, or with the actual awakening, or the less pleasing incidents which somehow seem much to mar the sequel of the dainty story in Perrault's version. Here each picture explains, by foreshadowing or illustrating, the others; and the "flower and quintessence" of the legend is conveyed with artistic completeness, but with a subtle and satisfying suggestiveness which avoids what Edgar Poe (in his "Fall of the House of Usher") calls that "uncouth and unimaginative prolixity which could have little interest for lofty and spiritual ideality." Indeed, the whole treatment of the theme is ideal in the highest degree; we are veritably and consciously in Fairyland—

"A wild weird clime that lieth, sublime,
Out of Space—out of Time,"

suffused with the "light which never was on sea or shore," above Archæology, and independent of the claims of Costume.

I.—The Briarwood.

"The fateful slumber floats and flows
About the tangle of the rose ;
But lo ! the fated hand and heart
To rend the slumberous curse apart !"

The first picture presents to us the enchanted briar-thicket, the prostrate and slumbering forms of the knights who from time to time have failed to penetrate it, and the entrance of the Fairy Prince who is fated to succeed. Before his advance the intricate and thorny "Tangles of the Rose" yield readily. "A peine s'avança-t-il vers le Bois, que tous ces grands arbres, ces ronces, et ces épines s'écartèrent d'elles-mêmes pour le laisser passer: il marche vers le Château qu'il voyoit au bout d'une grande avenue où il entra, et ce qui le surprit un peu, il vit que personne de ses gens ne l'avoient pû suivre, parceque les arbres s'étoient rapprochez dès qu'il avoit été passé." So says the old French legend.

The solitary Knight enters at the left of the picture, lifting with his shield the spiny sweeps of the briar, and with lowered sword, gazing intently and gravely forward, as though rapt in vision of his adventurous Quest. This is not the

"Fairy Prince, with joyful eyes,
And lighter-footed than the fox,"

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THE BRIAR ROSE.

of the Laureate's verse; rather a steel-clad young Lancelot, dark-eyed and gravely dauntless. His closely-fitting and complete suit of steel is wonderfully painted, mirroring in its subdued lustre the gloom of the thicket, the glow of the pinky-rose blossoms, and the gleam of scattered lights.

Before him lie the sleep-locked forms of five other knights, diversely clad, who have failed in the tempting quest, and mastered by the "slumberous curse," are heavily drowsing amidst the bramble-knots, their armour, Gothic, Moorish, or Saracenic, unruined in the magic air; their casques fallen aside, showing their faces set in sleep, but living and unmarred; their shields caught up above them by the ceaseless growth of the Briarwood. Here lies a loosened sword, and there an unstrung bow. Beautiful in composition and lovely in colour, the picture satisfies the eye, and invites the closer scrutiny it well repays. Armour, drapery, faces, all abound in passages of exquisite colour, of subdued lustre and subtle graduation, blent in one admirable whole in which nothing jars or fails to harmonise. And all about is the beautiful briar wilderness, ubiquitous but so artistically managed as never to be wearisome or obtrusive. "The Briarwood" is a triumph of poetical sentiment and unstrained decorative treatment.

II.—The Council Room.

"The threat of war, the hope of peace,
The Kingdom's peril and increase
Sleep on, and bide the latter day,
When Fate shall take her chain away."

Here we are introduced to the council-chamber of the sleep-smitten king. He is huddled up with bowed head, trailing white beard, and contracted feet, in quaint costume, upon a highly decorative cage-like throne. Bronze, silver, lapis lazuli, and all delicately subdued jewel-tints are blent in his ingeniously devised surroundings. An open written scroll lies unregarded on his lap. At his side on a low stool stands an hour-glass, whose sands last run a century since. Nearest his feet reclines his councillor-in-chief, asleep indeed, but astute-looking even in slumber, seeming as though he were either feigning somnolence, or dreaming in some brief nap of diplomatic subtleties and deep devices of statecraft. His face presents perhaps the only touch of obvious humour in the composition. Tennyson speaks of his "lay" as "earnest wed with sport." In Mr. Burne Jones's treatment the sportiveness is far from conspicuous, the earnestness, as usual with him, is dominant everywhere.

Nearest him couches the chancellor or treasurer, his slumber-relaxed fingers lying within a scrip or purse. All about lie the slumber-locked councillors and courtiers of the drowsing king. Like a congre-

gation of courtly lotos-eaters they "live and lie reclined," in attitudes skilfully varied, with draperies beautifully designed and deliciously coloured. The opiate charm holds them all, even the sentry on the left, who with forward fallen head sits leaning on his spear. Behind a beautifully painted bronze grille are visible faces of guards and attendants, also all lapped in unstirring slumber. And everywhere, the only quick and changing thing in the whole sleep-locked scene, twines and trails the flowering tangle of the Magic Briar.

III.—The Garden Court.

"The maiden pleasance of the land
Knoweth no stir of voice or hand,
No cup the sleeping waters fill,
The restless shuttle lieth still."

As the second canvas showed the slumbering king's councillors, so this, an open-air scene, shows the sleeping handmaidens of the spell-bound princess. It would seem to be the painter's own conception, unborrowed from Legend or Laureate. "Il traverse plusieurs chambres pleines de Gentilhommes et de Dames, dormans tous, les uns debout, les autres assis." So says Perrault briefly. Mr. Burne Jones gives us the Garden Court, with fountain and sun-dial, and background of exquisitely painted Gothic wall. A loom has been erected here, and here, when the

"slumbrous curse" first fell, the Princess's maidens were at work or at play. In garments delicately moulded, of colours beautifully harmonised, they recline in the attitudes into which sudden sleep struck them a century since. Lovely are the tones and tints of this canvas; charming, with the painter's own peculiar charm, are the soft pensive faces of the drowsing girls. One, robed in red, has fallen forward on the framework of the loom, her head upon her rounded arm, the shuttle lying where her relaxed fingers dropped it so long ago. About the loom, and beside the unflowing fountain, recline the other maidens. The woodwork of the loom, the wools, the stone and metal of fount and sundial, the background of wall and window are, like the skilfully varied draperies of the girls themselves, most delicately and deliciously painted. The whole picture is steeped in the very glamour of romance; the glow and gleam of the enchanted numbers of Keats are over it all. Not more witchingly painted—in words as here in tints—are the poet's

" Magic casements opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in fairy-lands forlorn."

The spirit of poetry indeed pervades the whole picture, like the lovely trails of the Magic Briar which, in sunlight and shade, on marble floor and in mid-air, cluster about the recumbent forms, stretch from wall to wall, and loop rosily from loom to fountain.

IV.—The Rosebower.

“There lies the hoarded love, the key
 To all the treasures that shall be ;
 Come fated hand the gift to take,
 And smite this sleeping world awake.”

Says Perrault, following the adventurous footsteps of his fairy Prince, “Il entre dans une chambre toute dorée, et il vit sur un lit, dont les rideaux étoient ouverts de tous côtez, le plus beau spectacle qu’il eut jamais vû : une Princesse qui paroissoit avoir quinze ou seize ans, et dont l’éclat resplendissant avoit quelque chose de lumineux et de divin.”

Here is the “chambre toute dorée,” and about the slumbering Princess there is doubtless “quelque chose de lumineux et de divin.” But it is the luminousness of purity, the divinity of virginal grace, rather than any “éclat resplendissant.” The Princess fulfils the Laureate’s idea of “a simple maiden in her flower,” rather than that of the opulent loveliness suggested by his glowing description of the “Sleeping Beauty” in her “Day-Dream” :—

“Year after year, unto her feet,
 She lying on the couch alone,
 Across the purpled coverlet
 The maiden’s jet-black hair has grown,
 On either side her trancèd form,
 Forth streaming from a braid of pearl :
 The slumbrous light is rich and warm,
 And moves not on the rounded curl.

—STANDARD, 31st January, 1868.

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"The silk star-broider'd coverlid
Unto her limbs itself doth mould
Languidly ever ; and, amid
Her full black ringlets downward roll'd,
Glow's forth each softly shadow'd arm
With bracelets of the diamond bright ;
Her constant beauty doth inform
Stillness with love, and day with light.

"She sleeps : her breathings are not heard
In palace chambers far apart.
The fragrant tresses are not stirr'd
That lie upon her charmèd heart.
She sleeps : on either hand upswells
The gold-fringed pillow lightly prest ;
She sleeps, nor dreams, but ever dwells
A perfect form in perfect rest."

This is a picture of gorgeous loveliness indeed. It will be seen that the ideal of the youthful poet differs materially from that of the mature painter. The painter's Princess, the centre and core of the whole beautiful dream—

"The hoarded love, the key
To all the treasures that shall be,"

is no raven-tressed beauty of Oriental splendour, such as might have stepped out of the "Arabian Nights," but a sweet-faced girl with hair lightly loosened, but not abundant or "forth-streaming," reclining simply upon a couch finely wrought, but quaint rather than sumptuous.

Such a Lancelot-like Knight as is seen entering the

Briarwood in the first picture, might well be charmed and drawn by such an Elaine-like face as that of this "Sleeping Beauty." It is the proper climax of the painter's original and refined conception. "The fated heart" is set upon just such a vision, and this is the "gift" that the "fated hand" is to take. Not yet, however, is there any sign of the sleeping world being smitten awake. That does not enter into the painter's scheme. The "perfect form" of the princess is still "in perfect rest," her ladies are still lapt in unbroken slumbers. The light with which the chamber glows is the wonderfully-rendered light of the land of dreams, untouched by the most distant suggestion of the long-delayed but now imminent day-dawn. The hanging-lamp above still burns, though the silver bells are silent, the lute is mute, the jewel-casket is unsearched. All these details are painted as only Mr. Burne Jones could paint them. The subdued splendour, the polychromatic harmony of this picture, will be acknowledged to be marvellous. The framework and hangings of the bed, the rose and silver of the pillow, the pale purple of the couch, the golden hem, the red carpet, with its quaint pattern of dusky-blue peacocks, the subdued sheen of metal, the soft lustre of jewels,—all these make up a dream of dainty colouring which hardly another hand could realize. The sleeping maidens are very lovely, their draperies are exquisite, their embroideries and ornaments wonderful. The "quaint devices" and "splendid dyes," the "warm gules," and "rose-bloom," and "silver," and "soft amethyst" of Madeline's chamber in the "Eve of St. Agnes," could

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not be more lovely than are the tints of this other virginal chamber, in which Mr. Burne Jones's girl-faced princess had "laid her down in loveliness" and slept for the fated hundred years.

And into the Rosebower also the ever-present Briar Rose has forced its fated way. "The tangle of the rose" is about the Sleeping Princess here, as about the destined Awakener in the first picture, the Council Room of the second, and the "Maiden Pleasance" of the third. Its spiny trails and pink blossoms link and bind into a subtly suggested unity the splendid series of marvellously painted pictures in which Mr. Burne Jones has as skilfully as beautifully illustrated "The Legend of the Briar Rose."

E. J. MILLIKEN.

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- "The description of the manufacture of Gold and the various Hall-marks are well worth perusal."
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OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

"THE TIMES," April 25, 1890.

AT last the public and the artist may alike congratulate themselves that the "Sleeping Beauty" series is finished. For many years Mr. Burne-Jones has been at work upon it; for many years, whatever else he may have begun and finished in the interval, these four large pictures have been, so to speak, in the background, always occupying his thoughts and his invention, even when they were not occupying his hand. During the past year they have demanded his almost exclusive service; and now at last they are finished, and are on view to all the world at Messrs. Agnew's Gallery, in Old Bond Street. It had been hoped that they would form part of the forthcoming exhibition at the New Gallery, and some had even thought it possible that they might go to the Royal Academy; but neither of these plans suited the arrangements of the owners, Messrs. Agnew, who have, perhaps naturally, preferred to show so important a series of works in their own gallery. It is said that they will afterwards make the tour of the country, and perhaps, if tariff difficulties can be got over, they may be shown in America. It is safe to prophesy that wherever they go they will receive, together with no little criticism, an abundance of admiration, for they certainly display in the most striking form all the characteristics of Mr. Burne-Jones's extremely interesting art.

It is with something of a shock that one finds all this invention, all this abundant wealth of fancy, all this research after beauty, and all this minute elaboration of the parts devoted to the illustration of a fairy-tale. For it is nothing more nor less than the old story of the Sleeping Beauty, the *Belle au Bois dormant*, that Mr. Burne-Jones has painted in four pictures, each 9 ft. by 4 ft., and each full of figures three parts the size of life. One is tempted to ask for the moral of it all, but the painter would meet such a question as the poet of "The Day-Dream" met it long ago:—

"Oh, to what uses shall we put
The wildweed flower that simply blows?
And is there any moral shut
Within the bosom of the rose?"

If the mind of an artist lives and moves among myths and fairy tales, it is to Fairyland that he must go for his subjects,

and all that we have to ask is that he should paint them beautifully. And few will be found to deny that Mr. Burne-Jones has lavished beauty upon his rendering of the ancient story, or that he has surpassed himself in the prodigality of delightful colour, and in the unailing charm of line which he offers us in these pictures. Moreover, both friendly and hostile critics will agree that the subject chosen is one admirably suited to his art—an art which is of no certain date, which delights to interpret a world that never was and never will be, a world as far removed from the actualities of life as dreams are, or the shining visions of the old glass-painters. We have to take all this for granted in judging Mr. Burne-Jones. Our enjoyment of his pictures must in a great measure depend on our feelings for or against that remote, half allegorical poetry which was once so much in vogue throughout Europe, though it has become hopelessly out of fashion with a positive-minded generation that seeks for realism in all things. Indeed, we might say that the art of Mr. Burne-Jones was the poetry of the *Roman de la Rose* stripped of its *longueurs*, concentrated, made definite, and invested with a new brilliancy of colour by the painter's hand.

The story of the Sleeping Beauty is told, as we have said, in four pictures, to each of which Mr. William Morris has added an explanatory quatrain. The first describes how the magic Briar Rose—that protection which plays in this story almost the same part that is played by the watchful dragon or by the triple wall in parallel stories all over the world—has grown round the palace, but how the Prince passes through:—

“A fateful slumber floats and flows
About the tangle of the rose;
But lo! the fated hand and heart
To rend the slumberous curse apart.”

The five knights are lying asleep on the ground; their shields, each of which bears some subtle, allegorical design, are hung on the thick branches of the briar; only the Prince is standing awake and with drawn sword. As to the detail, it is enough to say that here, as in the other pictures, the artist has revelled in his opportunities, and that the light and shade of the armour, the colours of the knights' scarves, and the fantastic lines of the rose-branches have found in him a loving interpreter. In the second picture we are introduced into the sleeping palace itself, where the spell has fallen upon the King and his Court:—

“The threat of war, the hope of peace,
The kingdom's peril and increase,
Sleep on and bide the latter day,
When Fate shall take her chain away.”

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To the right is the old King asleep on his throne ; his dress, like that of the later Roman Emperors, is almost exactly that which has been preserved for us in the Papal robes, white, with a crown that suggests the tiara ; his throne, with its green twisted columns, is curiously beautiful. Before him sleep his minister, whose wily features show the adept in statecraft ; his favourite poet, some of his courtiers, and a brilliant young soldier. Their figures and the exquisitely harmonised colours of their robes are reflected in a wonderful marble pavement ; and beyond, on the other side of a trellis and curtain, other sleeping figures are dimly seen. These two are pictures of men ; the third and the fourth have to do with the Princess and her fair damsels. The third will probably be the general favourite ; it shows three girls who have fallen asleep at the well, and three on whom the spell has come as they worked at the loom :—

“ The maiden pleasure of the land
Knoweth no stir of voice or hand !
No cup the sleeping waters fill,
The restless shuttle lieth still.”

It is hard to find words to express the delicate beauty of this picture, or the subtle skill with which these blues and purples, these greens and greys have been wrought into harmony. The transparent floor is a marvel of painting, and the artist has been as careful with the details of jar and basket as ever were Lippi or Ghirlandajo. In the last picture we have the Sleeping Beauty herself, stretched stiff and straight upon her couch ; two sleeping maidens at her feet and one by her side :—

“ Here lies the hoarded love, the key
To all the treasure that shall be ;
Come, fated hand, the gift to take,
And smite the sleeping world awake !”

The painter has naturally put his whole strength into the faces of the Princess and her maidens, but the eye is tempted to wander from them to the lovely accessories of this picture—to the greyish-white coverlet, to the purple cloth over the couch inwrought with figures of doves, to the amulets and charms with which the quaint invention of the painter has surrounded her ; to the carpet, with its delicious design of blue peacocks on a red ground, to the gorgeous casket. We are accustomed to this evidence of loving care in Mr. Burne-Jones's pictures, but it has never been shown before on so large a scale and with such exuberance of fancy as in these four pictures. The world of dreams and fairies has surely never been so prodigally illustrated.

"THE ATHENÆUM," April 26th, 1890.

AFTER about seven years' intermitting labour, Mr. Burne-Jones has finished the four important paintings in oil (to which we have more than once referred) which are designed to illustrate the "Legend of the Briar Rose," which is a version of the ancient and better-known history of the Sleeping Beauty, or "Sleeping Palace," as the Laureate has it. These pictures are highly and brilliantly finished, full of figures and details of many kinds, and of uniform size, about 11 ft. by 5 ft., landscape way. They were begun on commission from the late Mr. Graham, but are the property of Messrs. Agnew & Son, who intend to exhibit them all during the season at their gallery in Old Bond Street. The private view occurred yesterday (Friday).

Mr. William Morris has supplied mottoes for his friend's pictures, as he did for a previous series which the *Athenæum* described. It is hardly needful to say that in illustrating a dateless legend the painter has selected what costume he thought fit, without the least regard to archæology. As he has to deal with a romance, not with a history, antiquaries must take, or leave, the paintings as they find them. The first in order is inscribed: *The fateful Slumber floats and flows about the Tangles of the Rose, but, Lo, the fated Hand and Heart to rend the slumbrous Curse apart!*

Here, at the outset of the series, we observe that each work is pervaded by a pure, soft, and mystical light, differing in degree of intensity, and adapted to the progress of the legend from the semi-darkness of the woodland which is the scene of the first painting to the uniform, but subdued brightness of the "chamber far apart," where the enchanted lady and her maidens lie at rest. We are to understand that since the "slumbrous curse" began to operate centuries have passed. The lives of the King, his councillors and knights, the royal damsel and her attendants, have been suspended; but all the rest of the world has gone on its way. The trees have grown larger and more numerous, the shrubs have flourished unchecked, so that the building was almost covered by the briars, which, developing in the magic air, form a dense thicket, till now impenetrable, and have blocked the doors and crept in at the windows, and thrust themselves along the corridors until they have reached the chamber of the princess.

During the lapse of ages many knights had striven to penetrate the thicket and deliver the princess. Adventurer after adventurer has entered, but none has passed through or returned. Failing to overcome the spell, each succumbed to it,

REVIEWS OF MR. EDWIN W. STREETER'S BOOK OF JEWELLERY AND GOLD.

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and sinking to the earth slept as the inmates of the palace slept. Suffering no change, his weapons have not rusted, nor his attire decayed. Accordingly the painter has represented each man in the garb of his time : the Celt in tegulated armour, the Gothic knight beside the Saracen or Moor ; here a champion clad in mail, there another in steel plates. From every head but one the helmets have rolled away, leaving bare the martial faces, in which the look of life is stilled, but not lost. The shields that have fallen from their grasp have been lifted up by the ever-growing briars that have twined about the baldrics, so that each escutcheon hangs above its owner. So profound is the repose of the unsuccessful champions that when the fated knight appears, breaking his way through the underwood, their slumbers are unbroken. He is clad in steel from head to foot, and upon the polished surface of his armour the gloom of the thicket is reflected, and so are rays of light from above, and flecks of colour from the roses round about. He pushes aside the branches with his shield, and in the other hand holds his sword. A large part of the charm of this picture is due to the look of the knight. His dark eyes are distinct in the shadow of his vizor, but, heedless of the lost champions at his feet, he seems to gaze far beyond the tangles of the wood and discern victory where others have failed. The features are as beautiful as their expression is poetical. The picture's coloration, light, and shade, the very gloom of the briary wilderness, the strange armour of the knights, the immobility of their faces, and the rapture of the prince, who moves as in a world apart, are appropriate to the magic whose charm is soon to be broken.

The motto of the second picture is *The Threat of War, the Hope of Peace, the Kingdom's Peril and Increase, sleep on, and bide the later Day when Fate shall take her Chain away*. It depicts the council chamber of the white-bearded king. He sits on his throne of bronze, wrapped in embroidered cloth of silver, and wearing a quaint crown. Although sleeping, he still holds in one hand an open scroll, which seems to have been the subject of discussion with the lords who lie on couches or on the floor near their master. Nearest, reclines the chief councillor in blue, a crafty smile fixed upon his face ; close by is the treasurer, with his hand on his special charge, the purse ; next to him slumbers the general in his armour. On our left the sentry, fixed in sleep, leans upon his spear. Through a grille of gilt bronze behind these figures are visible the faces of the guards and attendants in an outer chamber. The hour-glass, long at rest, is on a stool near the king. The briars penetrate the grille and extend themselves over the couches and the

"THE ATHENÆUM," April 26th, 1890.

AFTER about seven years' intermitting labour, Mr. Burne-Jones has finished the four important paintings in oil (to which we have more than once referred) which are designed to illustrate the "Legend of the Briar Rose," which is a version of the ancient and better-known history of the Sleeping Beauty, or "Sleeping Palace," as the Laureate has it. These pictures are highly and brilliantly finished, full of figures and details of many kinds, and of uniform size, about 11 ft. by 5 ft., landscape way. They were begun on commission from the late Mr. Graham, but are the property of Messrs. Agnew & Son, who intend to exhibit them all during the season at their gallery in Old Bond Street. The private view occurred yesterday (Friday).

Mr. William Morris has supplied mottoes for his friend's pictures, as he did for a previous series which the *Athenæum* described. It is hardly needful to say that in illustrating a dateless legend the painter has selected what costume he thought fit, without the least regard to archaeology. As he has to deal with a romance, not with a history, antiquaries must take, or leave, the paintings as they find them. The first in order is inscribed: *The fateful Slumber floats and flows about the Tangles of the Rose, but, Lo, the fated Hand and Heart to rend the slumbrous Curse apart!*

Here, at the outset of the series, we observe that each work is pervaded by a pure, soft, and mystical light, differing in degree of intensity, and adapted to the progress of the legend from the semi-darkness of the woodland which is the scene of the first painting to the uniform, but subdued brightness of the "chamber far apart," where the enchanted lady and her maidens lie at rest. We are to understand that since the "slumbrous curse" began to operate centuries have passed. The lives of the King, his councillors and knights, the royal damsel and her attendants, have been suspended; but all the rest of the world has gone on its way. The trees have grown larger and more numerous, the shrubs have flourished unchecked, so that the building was almost covered by the briars, which, developing in the magic air, form a dense thicket, till now impenetrable, and have blocked the doors and crept in at the windows, and thrust themselves along the corridors until they have reached the chamber of the princess.

During the lapse of ages many knights had striven to penetrate the thicket and deliver the princess. Adventurer after adventurer has entered, but none has passed through or returned. Failing to overcome the spell, each succumbed to it,

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throne. The softened light is much brighter than in the first picture.

The motto of the third picture is *The Maiden Pleasance of the Land knoweth no Stir of Voice or Hand. No Cup the sleeping Waters fill; the restless Shuttle lieth still.* Here the scene is a courtyard open to the air, where the giant arms of the magical briars form great loops, and from the fountain on one side to the loom on the other stretch along in the sunlight. The maiden at the loom (she is clad in deep rose-red) leans over her wrap, and, with her face resting on her crossed arms, sleeps as she has slept for centuries. Another lies on the floor, and a third sits on the loom frame. At the fountain slumber three other maidens clad in beautiful colours, which are beautifully harmonized with the chromatic and tone schemes of the entire picture.

The motto of the fourth painting is *Here lies the hoarded Love, the Key to all the Treasures that shall be. Come, fated Hand, the Gift to take, and smite this sleeping World awake.* This depicts the princess's chamber, which is surcharged with a rosy and golden light, so that there are hardly any shadows, and the delicate splendour of the scene, the beautiful forms of the sleeping ladies, their sumptuous garments, embroideries, and jewellery, lose none of their charms. The royal damsel, who is clad in warm white, lies under a coverlet adorned with needlework in silver; her face, which is turned towards us, is a little flushed by the life within, her lips are touched with a smile, and every limb and feature bespeaks "a perfect form in perfect rest." The charm of her face is enhanced by the slight disorder of her hair and the stillness of her eyelids. The pillow on which her head rests is of dark rose colour and silver; her couch is pale purple, with a broad hem of gold, upon which a quaint line of silver bells hangs from a cord of the same metal. Near the princess's shoulder the fairest of her maids of honour reposes upon the floor, her lute lying at her hand, while near her feet two other maidens form a fine group. In front lies a casket of jewellery, to which a briar has reached; near it is an inlaid mirror; over the princess's head hangs a silver bell; the carpet at the side of her couch is of a dark red ground with a pattern of deep blue peacocks. Upon the central group the artist has concentrated all the resources of his palette, and he has displayed exquisite taste in producing a combination of hues more lovely than anything he has hitherto achieved. The figures and faces of the princess and her principal attendant are worthy of their place as the crowning elements of the superb series which closes with them.

Nov., 1861.

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"THE SPEAKER," May 3, 1890.

BEFORE the bustle and tumult of the Royal Academy, the Grosvenor, and the New, are fully upon us, it may not be altogether loss to spare a little time for Mr. Burne-Jones, A.R.A., and his four great pictures illustrative of the legend of Prince Charming and the Lady of the Sleeping Wood. Their painter, indeed, has given them seven years of unremitting industry. And it well may be that in the distant future, when every other picture of this year of grace, whether shown in busy London or by the fashionable banks of the Seine, has been forgotten, these works will be remembered and held in ever-increasing reverence; for whatever their merits or demerits, they have this high quality—they are unique; they and their painter stand royally alone. Nor dispute as we will about their conventionality, their *technique*, their meaning, and much else concerning them, about which Mr. Burne-Jones never troubled his thoughts, can we with justice, if we have any sense of what is artistic, refuse to admit that a spirit of indefinable and subtle beauty pervades them.

To describe them at all adequately would need more space than we can give. They are uniform in size, 11 feet long by 5 feet high. The artist has chosen, not the very incident of the awakening from the century of mystic slumber, but the eve of that fateful moment. In the first we have "the fated fairy Prince," just stepping into light, with his shield pushing back the mighty Rose-briar which, "thick, close-matted, a wall of green," obscures the dim light, and creeps along the earth in brown coils, big as serpents' bodies. Before him lie, just as they fell, his predecessors. But "the many fail; the one succeeds;" and he is the obedient servant of the high gods. Preceding the Prince into the council-room where King, Chancellor, and courtiers; all,

"The threat of war, the hope of peace,
The Kingdom's peril and increase,
Sleep on,"

next we are in the "maiden pleasance of the land," an open quadrangle, spacious, luminous with mellow light, where virgins clad in robes of soft splendour, rich, deep-toned and beautiful, sleep in attitudes of exquisite grace. Lastly, we enter the Rose-bower, the sanctuary of the Princess, where, in this finer light, the silence is almost audible, and the palpable stillness of the charm rests on all till the magic kiss shall touch the lady's lips, and invincible love "smite this sleeping world awake."

These pictures must be looked upon chiefly as a very noble form of decorative art. They are, of course, entirely conventional in their treatment. But all art is so. All that we can demand is that the convention be broad and consistent through-

out. Here the convention is noble, dignified, tranquil, homogeneous in all its details, and satisfying. Mr. Burne-Jones takes us into the ideal land of pure romance. At first glance there is much we feel inclined to resent, but gradually we see the artist's meaning as a whole, and every detail grows harmonious, and his work clearly comprehensible, not to say in a certain sense natural. In the third picture we find the artist at his perfection—balance of composition, luminosity, breadth, daring and luxurious colour, and the most graceful figures he has ever drawn. In the fourth the high merits cease to rise *in crescendo*, and he in some sense fails to realise the crowning loveliness, the constant beauty which informs "stillness with love and day with light," the perfect form in perfect rest.

Dealing with fairy-land, the artist has asserted his right to be eclectic as to place and date. The folds of his drapery are all conventionally treated, especially when he desires to imply deeper repose, as in the rigid folds of the Princess's couch-covering. Sir Joshua Reynolds held that artists were wrong to concern themselves with texture, that they had no right to indicate fabrics—silk, velvet, linen—that to paint drapery should be their only aim. Mr. Burne-Jones apparently agrees with him. He indicates but one material, though in some cases we wish he would make it less felt or baize-like—something a little diaphanous would here and there be such a relief. And this brings us to the artist's abiding fault: His colour is superb; his management of crimsons, blues, and purples of Oriental voluptuousness and splendour, and yet a "soft lustre" suffuses it all. But it lacks brilliancy, depth, light, variety. A sense of monotony characterises all this artist's paintings, giving them almost the appearance of tapestries. Mr. Burne-Jones' feeling is, of course, toward the earlier Italian masters; but they had mechanical secrets for compounding, making, and applying their colour undreamed of by their living admirer. Rossetti at whose feet Mr. Burne-Jones sat, has been surpassed in freedom and grace of drawing, in imagination, and in refinement by his pupil, who attains in these pictures, his master-work, to a position of which we may be proud as a nation—for he is British by birth, education, and feeling, has studied in no foreign schools, and the substance and the manner of his work are totally unlike anything else at home or abroad.

What is the soul of this allegory? Is not beauty sufficient? And we may say in Carlyle's phrase that these pictures are significant of much—or nothing—according to those who look at them. It only remains to add that they are on view at Messrs. Agnew's, in Bond Street, where they are seen to the best advantage in a gallery especially and admirably prepared to suit them.

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OF
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